



# CALIFORNIA JOURNAL OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT AND NEWS NOTES

### SYMPOSIUM ON SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

The project of preparing a series of articles on school-community relationships for publication in the *California Journal of Elementary Education* has stimulated extraordinary interest and wide-spread participation. This issue and the one to follow will be devoted to presentation of the material assembled on the most important phases of this extensive subject.

The idea of pooling experiences of successful public relations activities in school systems throughout California in a publication which would reach every elementary school originated with the Committee on Public Relations of the California School Supervisors Association. Preliminary canvass of content and organization of such a publication occurred during the meetings of the Committee held in connection with the annual Conference on the Direction and Improvement of Instruction and on Child Welfare called by the Superintendent of Public Instruction at San Jose, in October, 1949.

The membership of the Committee on Public Relations \* of the California School Supervisors Association includes the following educators:

EDWARD C. BRITTON, Assistant Professor of Education, Sacramento State College, *Chairman*

MAURICE G. BLAIR, Assistant Superintendent, Los Angeles Public Schools

ELDON J. COVELL, Director of Elementary Education and Guidance Co-ordinator, Monterey Public Schools

HELEN P. DOAK, General Supervisor of Elementary Instruction, Alhambra Public Schools

STEPHEN ELLIOTT, Co-ordinator of Elementary Curriculum, Montebello Public Schools

ERNEST E. FRASHER, General Consultant, Office of Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

\* Recently renamed as the Committee on School-Community Relationships.

HARRY B. FRISHMAN, Supervisor of Publications, Long Beach Public Schools

MRS. ANNA FORBES GERHOLDT, General Supervisor of Instruction, Sonoma County

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ARCH D. LANG, Assistant Professor of Education, San Francisco State College

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S. E. TORSTEN LUND, Associate Professor of Education, University of California

MRS. FRANCES P. NELSON, General Supervisor of Instruction, Ventura County

EVA A. RIECKS, Supervisor, Elementary Division, Burbank Public Schools

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EMERY STOOBS, Administrative Assistant, Office of Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools

FRED L. TROTT, formerly Principal, Deep Creek Elementary School, Tulare County

DWIGHT E. TWIST, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, San Joaquin County

MRS. HELEN COWAN WOOD, Assistant to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Department of Education, Los Angeles

NICHOLAS E. WYCKOFF, Public Information Officer, State Department of Education, Sacramento

Following the San Jose meeting, Edward C. Britton, Chairman of the Committee on Public Relations and, at that time, Director of the Colusa County Community School Project, agreed to implement the plans of the Committee.

An invitation was issued to all state-wide educational organizations to meet in the offices of the State Department of



Education for a two-day conference, February 9-10, 1950. Members of the Elementary Education staff were in attendance to serve as consultants and resource persons. Secretarial assistance was provided to facilitate the preparation of materials.

Many organizations responded with enthusiasm to the invitation to give direction to the project. Innumerable suggestions made in the course of the conference have been incorporated into articles prepared by individual authors. Specific illustrations of promising practices were noted by the authors and used in connection with appropriate topics. Each author of an article is indebted to many conference participants for expressions of points of view, experiences in a variety of different localities, and reports of well-executed programs.

The California Congress of Parents and Teachers was ably represented by its President (1948-1950), Mrs. G. L. Luhr, and the Chairman of School Education, Mrs. Ralph Dow. Material was subsequently made available by Mrs. Max Colwell, Chairman of College Service and Parent-Teacher Instructor, and Mrs. Robert M. Bogen, Chairman of Parent Education.

The California Federation of Women's Clubs sent Mrs. Edward K. Lange to represent the state-wide interests of the Federation in public education. The unfailing support by the Federation and its individual member clubs of civic, social, and cultural projects designed to promote human welfare was evident in the many practical suggestions that Mrs. Lange contributed to the group discussions.

The California Teachers Association was represented by Robert E. McKay, who stressed the special responsibility of education to keep the public completely informed on all problems involving the welfare of the institution of public education, which is fundamental to the preservation of the principles and ideals of American democracy. Mr. McKay emphasized the distinctive character of a public relations program in public education. In a sense, such a public relations program is a report of stewardship from the education profession to the citizens concerning one of the most significant functions of government.

In a report of stewardship, it is incumbent upon educators to maintain the highest ethical standards. The report must be characterized by sincerity and devotion to public service.

The California Elementary School Administrators Association was represented by Bert Chappell, Principal of the David Lubin School, Sacramento. Every school in California should have an administrator in charge who recognizes public relations as a major function. The elementary school administrator occupies a strategic position in interpreting modern education to the community he serves because of the close relationship of every teacher to the parents of the children taught in the school.

The American Association of University Women was represented by Mrs. Aubrey Douglass and Mrs. Donald Pearson, who not only brought their own deep personal interest to the problems of the conference but reflected accurately the active program of their organizations in promoting sound school-community relations.

The California Youth Authority was represented by Vandyce Hamren, who offered for consideration by the group the major problems encountered by the Youth Authority in arousing communities to dynamic programs of action in meeting the needs of young people. Mr. Hamren's interest in the welfare of handicapped children brought into sharp focus the problems encountered in securing public understanding of the valuable services now rendered by public education to children and youth who are physically, mentally, or sensorily handicapped.

Mrs. Leslie W. Ganyard, Executive Secretary of the Rosenberg Foundation, represented the long-time interest of this organization in improved community life through methods of co-operation and co-ordination. The conference was fortunate in having contributions from community service projects that have developed under subventions from the Rosenberg Foundation. The programs developed by Mrs. E. Boaz, such as the South Bay Community Service in San Diego County, and by Mrs. Helen C. Ryan, Community Organizer for the project sponsored by the Long Beach Public Schools, were carefully studied during

the conference. The Colusa County Community Service Project, which was also carried on by means of a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation, was used as illustrative of effective ways in which schools and the communities they serve may work together. Many of the specific recommendations incorporated in these articles grew out of the experiences developed experimentally in such pilot situations. Mrs. Ganyard was able to share with the conference many details concerning techniques that have been tested in the field and found usable.

In assembling information about public relations in teacher-education programs, the Committee received valuable assistance from the following individuals and the institutions they represent:

W. HENRY COOKE, Claremont Graduate School  
KATHARINE W. DRESDEN, Chico State College  
WILL HAYES, Santa Barbara College, University of California  
BURTON HENRY, Humboldt State College  
JOHN U. MICHAELIS, University of California, Berkeley  
FRANCIS F. SMITH, Fresno State College  
ROBERT R. SMITH, San Francisco State College  
CLARICE D. WILLS, San Jose State College

In an enterprise involving the devoted volunteer effort of many school people and community members, it is hazardous to mention the names of individuals because of the danger of omitting some person who has made a significant contribution. As the work of the Committee progressed, it became increasingly evident that individuals were representing points of view that transcended their personal opinions; that contributors were in reality expressing the attitudes and understandings of school faculties, of professional and civic organizations, and the general community support of education. Certain persons, however—among them three members of the Committee—gave so freely of time and experience and contributed so generously the materials they had developed that special mention should be made of them and the groups and organizations they represented, officially or unofficially. A list of these persons and their positions follows.

HARRY B. FRISHMAN, Supervisor of Publications, Long Beach Public Schools

MRS. FRANCES P. NELSON, General Supervisor of Instruction, Ventura County

MRS. ELIZABETH GOUDY NOEL, Director of Curriculum, Yolo County

EVA A. RIECKS, General Supervisor, Burbank Unified School District

WILLIAM H. STEGEMAN, Professor of Education, Chico State College

V. E. SHEPHERD, Parent Education Consultant, Los Angeles Public Schools

ANDREW C. STEVENS, Principal, David Starr Jordan Junior High School, Palo Alto

MAURICE A. STOKESBARY, Deputy Superintendent, Alhambra Public Schools

GEORGE L. WHITE, General Supervisor of Instruction, Colusa County

The contributions of the various authors of the printed articles will be apparent to the reader, so no additional acknowledgments are made in this introductory statement. The members of this group have exemplified the definition of democracy as participation. The authors met as members of the Sacramento conference. They have worked individually and as a group and have willingly transferred material from one article to another when such a procedure seemed to make the material more effective. The entire compilation is a group enterprise with authorship representing not only the firsthand experiences of the author but vicarious experiences gained through the democratic procedures of discussion, interview, and conference.

The earnest hope of all contributors to this project is that the suggestions contained in the various articles may point the way to a carefully considered public relations program in every school and school system, large and small, in California. Youth may be fully served only as home, school, and community work in close co-operation and mutual understanding. Adults must join in a common knowledge of the growth needs of children and youth. Socially minded citizens and professional educators must review together and agree upon the purposes of education in a democracy. The general public must come to an understanding

of the basic elements of a well-balanced program of education for children and youth.

Certain forces at work in our society see a threat to special privilege in opportunities for education which are widely accessible and generously shared by all the children and youth of our country. Such forces seek to destroy public confidence in education behind a smoke screen of unsupported accusations that schools are not teaching the three R's, that schools are producing undisciplined boys and girls who threaten the stability of our social structure, that schools are devoting their time to "fads and frills" and neglecting the elements of sound education.

The only protection public education has against attackers who resist every sincere offer to have them examine the evidence is a well-conceived program of public enlightenment. School people will not be alone in planning or in carrying forward such a program. Individuals and organizations such as those who responded so willingly to the opportunity afforded by this publication are to be found in every community. The responsibility of educational leadership is to inform, to provide opportunity for co-operative study and planning, and to inspire to action.

HELEN HEFFERNAN

*Assistant Chief, Division of Instruction,  
Elementary Education*

*California State Department of Education*

## PARENT PARTICIPATION PAYS DIVIDENDS

JAY DAVIS CONNER, *Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction,  
and Chief of the Division of Instruction, California  
State Department of Education*

### ARE CLOSER SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS DESIRABLE?

The community school concept is not new, but the basic assumption upon which its claim for the attention of both professional educators and citizens is based has until recently remained untested. Is there a real basis for believing that schools will be better and the educational opportunities of children and adults improved by a closer relationship between the school program and the affairs of the community? Will schools be better schools if parents and teachers and school administrators come together more frequently and work in closer co-operation to plan and set up school experiences. School administrators, teachers, and parents alike have assumed that this would be the case. This assumption was responsible for the founding of the child study movement many years ago by Alice Burney and her associates. It has become common practice for school administrators and teachers alike to invite and encourage parents to visit the school and become better acquainted with the program which is being carried on in the interests of their children. Other groups of interested citizens have indicated their belief in the benefits that could be derived for society as well as for the school through closer understanding and co-operation. Noteworthy is the activity of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the American Legion co-operating with the National Education Association and other professional organizations to sponsor American Education Week, and, in California, the activity of the Masonic orders in promoting California Public Schools



Week, the basic element of which is the encouragement of all citizens to visit the public schools and inspect the work being carried on.

On the other hand, every parent and every teacher knows that this basic assumption is not accepted one hundred per cent by either teachers or parents. Many teachers, and possibly some administrators, accept this idea of the visiting of schools by parents with something more than "tongue in cheek." Certain teachers feel sincerely that they can do better work when they are left alone and when they are not interfered with by parents visiting in the schools too frequently. Doubtless certain school administrators have been harried by the amateurish suggestions and good will of sincere citizens who cannot understand why their ideas are not incorporated in the program and who do not accept in good grace the explanation that their suggestions are not practical. Likewise, many parents believe it is the teacher's job to manage the classroom and that their youngsters will be better off if parents stay at home and let the teachers take care of the instruction of their children in the school.

It would be difficult to estimate, in any objective way, the relative strength of these two opposite opinions. It is enough to recognize that a substantial group of professional educators and parents believe that it is to the best interests of the school program, to children and to society in general, for parents to be engaged actively with teachers in the planning and conducting of the educational program; and that another substantial group of parents and teachers believe that the school should be left alone to do its technical job without the interference of untrained people.

#### SAN DIEGO CONDUCTS AN EXPERIMENT TO DETERMINE THE VALUE OF CLOSER SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

A few years ago, the writer undertook to gather evidence as to whether the basic assumption that closer school-community relations improves education was sound or false. With material

assistance from the Federal Government, a study was conducted which involved 2000 elementary school children and their parents in seven elementary schools in San Diego. Preparations for this study occupied approximately two years. Forty-five different tests were devised and refined for use in the experiment and each step was carefully planned. Although the experiment itself lasted only 20 weeks, the tabulation, classification, and interpretation of data occupied several years following the study.

The experimental factor of the study was the provision of opportunity for teachers and parents to come together regularly in a planning, learning, and study-type situation under conditions which would permit exchange of ideas, experiences, and plans for action. The parents in the experimental schools were invited to spend two hours a week at the school. One of these hours was devoted to observation of the actual classroom procedures of the school, the other was used for discussion and planning by the parents with the teacher of their children. This procedure was conducted for 20 weeks, which approximately coincided with the spring semester, although the school system involved was not divided on a semester basis. The experiment actually started shortly after Christmas and ended about a month before the close of school to permit the tests and records to be completed without interfering with the end-of-the-year activities of the schools.

No prescribed plan was developed to govern the exact way in which each classroom group of parents and teacher would spend the two hours each week. It was purposely planned that each group would work out its own ideas for using the time to advantage with a minimum of control, so the results would be valid for any situation where parents and teachers planned together, regardless of whether a study was in progress. Naturally, under these circumstances a wide range was found in the specific activities of these weekly meetings.

The necessary precautions were taken to insure that the experimental groups and the control groups were well matched and well balanced in conformity with accepted research techniques. The experimental and control schools were selected with

care to insure the comparability of the communities involved in terms of socio-economic conditions, language, cultural pattern, and the like. The buildings and the school facilities were considered. The teaching staffs were carefully balanced and transfers made where necessary to insure that teachers had approximately the same amount of experience, training, salary, and competence. The schools and all the teachers participated in the study on a volunteer basis.

For purposes of the study, the curriculum was rigidly controlled. In this particular school system, under normal circumstances, individual classroom teachers are allowed a wide range of choice in determining the units of instruction in social studies and in determining the kind and amount of subject matter which will be covered during a given time. However, to insure the strict comparability of the experimental and control groups, all teachers agreed to follow precisely the same units of instruction, and to use the same textbooks and identical instructional aids and auxiliary services.

The pupils were carefully selected and matched so that each child in the experimental group had a partner in one of the control schools who was exactly comparable to him in chronological age, educational age, intelligence quotient, sex, socio-economic status of his family, and other pertinent factors.

The experimental and control partners likewise were carefully matched in terms of the degree of interest which their parents showed in their progress in school. It was quickly observable that certain parents had higher interest in their children's schoolwork than others. They demonstrated this interest by the regularity of their attendance at the weekly conferences. It was necessary, therefore, to insure that the progress of their children was measured only against the progress of children in the control schools whose parents were equally interested in their school life. In order to insure the comparability of the experimental and control groups on this basis, it was necessary to conduct another study the next year on similar lines for the control schools in order to select those parents who showed high

interest by their willingness to participate in an equally arduous program of activity.

Children in the experimental and control groups were tested prior to the beginning of the weekly conferences and were tested again at the close of the experimental period. The results give conclusive evidence in support of the assumption that the progress of children in school will be better when their parents are interested enough to understand the program and the experiences that the school is providing for their children; when they actually participate with the teachers in the planning of the school environment; and when, in turn, the teachers participate with parents in planning some aspects of the home and community environment so that a relationship will exist between the two.

Care was exercised so that parents and teachers would play their normal roles in the experiment. Parents were asked not to help their children in any school work, but they were encouraged to provide opportunities in the out-of-school life of their children for use of the skills and information that they were acquiring in school. Likewise, the teachers took no direct part in helping children plan for or conduct their out-of-school activities, but they were encouraged to make use of these out-of-school experiences and activities whenever situations arose naturally in the classroom.

#### THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP SHOWS GREATER GROWTH

In all of the regular subjects of the curriculum that could be tested by means of standardized achievement tests, the children in the experimental group exceeded the achievements of their matched partners in the control schools by differences that were statistically significant. In nontechnical language, this means that the mathematical chances are overwhelmingly conclusive that any similar experiment would show the children in the experimental group achieving more than those in the control group.

In all other areas of growth measured, the children of the experimental school consistently exceeded the achievements of

their matched partners in the control schools, though not always by amounts of difference statistically significant. One such area involved the friendship status of the children in school. The children in the experimental classes demonstrated that for some reason they were able to improve their position in the esteem of their fellow classmates as measured by the instruments utilized in this test. Likewise, an effort was made to measure the changes which took place in the home environment of the children participating in the study. While the study did not definitely set out to influence such changes, the evidence showed consistent changes in the homes of the experimental group children in the direction of providing experiences and opportunities which for the purposes of this study had been set up as being desirable from the point of view of the optimum growth and development of children.

#### PARENTS SHOW WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE

One of the incidental results provides a conclusive answer to the question of whether parents are sufficiently interested in their children to engage in participation that demands expenditure of time and effort in the interest of the school program. Parents richly demonstrated their willingness to devote much time and continued interest, as well as the ability to persevere in a program, provided they believe it of value to their children.

Of the original group of 865 parents invited to participate in the experiment, a number could not do so for one reason or another. In certain cases both parents worked, and in other cases the mother was an invalid or had a young child at home with no provision for leaving the child with anyone so that she could participate.

For a variety of reasons a number of parents did not participate to any great extent. Many of the reasons for this were valid, such as illness, absence from the city, and conflicting engagements that could not be resolved in favor of joining the experiment. No effort was made to determine what proportion of the parents who participated only a few times dropped out

due to lack of interest. Undoubtedly certain parents did not participate for this reason, but this number was so small as to rule out any generalization that parents are not interested in participation.

Regardless of the reasons for nonparticipation, it was decided to rule out of the experiment all parents who had not participated in at least six of the twenty conferences. Many parents participated in more than the maximum number of weekly conferences because certain parents had more than one child attending school and so went to the weekly discussions in more than one classroom. In other cases, parents became so interested that they voluntarily went to sit in on the discussions of other classrooms than the ones in which their children were enrolled. The result was, therefore, that parent participation ranged from 6 to more than 20 conferences during the study. These parents were divided into two groups. Those who attended from 6 to 11 times were included in what was called, for the purposes of study, the low interest group; those who participated in from 12 to 20 or more conferences were called the high interest group.

#### ALL CHILDREN PROFIT BY THE INTEREST OF SOME PARENTS

In each of the experimental classrooms a substantial number of children were present whose parents either did not elect to join the study groups or who did not participate frequently enough to be included in the official study. Since these children were available for study, their achievement was also compared with the achievement of the students in the control schools.

It should be understood that the children in the control schools could by no means be described as children whose parents did not participate in any way in the life of their children in school. Each one of these control schools had what might be called a standard kind of public relation program. Strong parent-teacher organizations were established in each of these schools. Frequent open-house programs and entertainments were provided at times when teachers and parents got together as they do



in any well-regulated school. By no means could these schools be said to be neglecting normal parent-teacher activities. The superior achievement of children in the schools where parents were regularly coming to meet with the teacher and observe the children in school becomes increasingly significant when this is understood.

The children in the experimental classrooms whose parents had not participated were, however, in a position to benefit by the enriched experiences of the other children. Therefore, it is exceedingly interesting to note that comparison of the achievement of children of nonparticipating parents in the experimental classrooms with that of the children in the control schools shows the children of nonparticipating parents in the experimental classrooms exceeded children in the control schools. The amounts of difference were not statistically significant but they were consistent, showing clearly that a residual effect of the co-operative planning of the parents of the other children in the room could be noted.

#### THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP GROWS IN MANY WAYS

In view of the fact that the teaching staff and the classrooms were carefully balanced it was possible to make certain comparisons at the close of the study by noting differences which were not present at the beginning of the experimental period. In order to determine whether changes had taken place, a series of devices and instruments for observing classroom situations were developed. One such device was aimed to measure the extent of verbal participation by teachers and pupils in the various classrooms. By means of this instrument it was definitely determined that in the classrooms involved in the experiment, the ratio of the number of times children participated to the number of times the teachers spoke had definitely changed in the direction of more participation by pupils in the experimental classrooms.

Likewise, it was possible to compare the work habits of the children. It was found that less loss of time occurred in the experimental classrooms; that the children knew how to go to

work and that they could take responsibility for their conduct in coming into the classroom and going to work as well as in finishing their work and leaving the classroom without the necessity for external controls initiated by the teacher.

Similarly, the source of the decisions that must be made throughout the day in every classroom was studied, and it was found that more of the suggestions of how to handle problems involved in planning and carrying out the activities of the group had their origin in the children in the experimental classrooms than in the control classrooms.

A study was made of the bulletin boards, the science corners and the other interest centers of the classrooms. These factors that influence the effectiveness of the learning situation were more functional in the experimental classrooms. By means of carefully developed charts for the observation of individual pupil participation in classroom activities, it was determined that children in the experimental classrooms were participating in a more vital manner; they were more interested; they persisted in following through to completion the activities that were commenced. Less inattention and daydreaming characterized the experimental group. The same kind of observation was possible to measure the growth of the teachers themselves. Those teachers who had participated in the experimental procedures demonstrated greater growth in service, both as measured by the changes that occurred in classroom procedures and also by their written testimony.

#### THE TEACHERS RATE THE EXPERIMENT

It was anticipated that the conduct of this experiment would be recognized by the teachers as a great additional load for them. While this was realized in the findings of the study, nevertheless the number of adverse comments by teachers participating in the experiment was extremely small. The testimony of the teachers was almost universal that the experiment had provided tremendous stimulus and had resulted in satisfaction greater than they had anticipated.

No doubt it was hard work for teachers to plan and conduct the activities incident to the weekly conferences. One of the principal areas of growth on the part of the teachers was the ability to work with adults. The discovery that parents would not necessarily be critical of conditions which made it difficult for the teacher to plan and have everything in readiness for the activities of the pupils, but would understand the problems of the teachers, was one of the most helpful findings of these teachers. They became less afraid of parents and realized the support that they had in the understanding and readiness of parents to share their problems.

#### EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES BECOME STANDARD PRACTICE

Considerable time has elapsed since this study was conducted. It is possible, therefore, to draw some conclusions concerning the lasting effects of such a study. In the city in which this study was conducted, planned opportunities for parent observation of classroom teaching and parent participation in determining and accomplishing the chief goals of education have become an accepted practice. Parents and teachers also work together to accomplish the goals. The intensive weekly conferences which were a part of the investigation were not suitable for continued use as a regular part of school procedure because of lack of time of personnel. However, the mere designation of the time without specification as to the exact things which should be done within the conference, make it possible to duplicate this experiment in any classroom, with any teacher, without special experience or preparation. Approximately the same results would accrue if parents were given the opportunity to visit classrooms on a less intensive but a continuing basis as their children progress through school. Perhaps not in the first year would any parent get an understanding of the school program equal to that acquired by the parents participating in this intensive study. On the other hand, by the time a child was in school for a number of years, if the parents had the opportunity to participate at least once or twice a semester while their child was in each successive

school year, they would acquire an understanding of the relation of the activities of the school to each level of growth and development.

Values demonstrated by this study can be achieved in any ordinary school in which planned continuous opportunities are provided for parents to visit under the guidance of the teacher and to share with the teacher in understanding and planning the objectives of the educational process.

## SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PLAN FOR YOUTH

MRS. AFTON D. NANCE, *Consultant in Elementary Education,  
California State Department of Education*

School and community share the responsibility for the education of youth. Both are concerned with providing the environment which will produce active, competent, socially minded participants in a democracy.

In order to provide such an environment, educators and other citizens work as partners in many joint enterprises. Pupils in present-day schools explore and study their communities. They use their immediate surroundings as rich laboratories for learning. The activities of many modern communities center around the school. It is the hub of enriching, vital experiences that utilize the willing energies and the special talents of socially minded adults. To be successful, such enterprises must be the result of planning together and must grow out of concerns which are vital to both school and community.

Co-operative programs require leadership of the highest type. Such leadership is inclusive, helps others to succeed, takes the blame, and shares the glory. A genuine liking of people and an indestructible faith in their potentialities for growth are characteristic of the person who is a successful leader of a group enterprise. This person may be the school principal, the president of the parent-teacher association, a teacher, a housewife, the banker, the butcher, or the baker. Leadership is the sole prerogative of no one person or group.

Organization is also necessary. Different patterns of organization have proved successful in meeting the needs of various communities. A study section organized in one class of a single school, a school mothers' club, the local, regional, or state parent-teacher association, a co-ordinating council representing many groups, and a lay advisory council have all proved their worth in specific situations.

Strong, democratic organizations include all groups in the community. Constructive school support may be developed in the area across the tracks, in minority groups, in the labor unions, or among the newcomers in the town, as well as in the organizations usually called upon for co-operation such as service clubs, chambers of commerce, and churches.

The purpose of this article is to describe how certain persons and groups have learned the lessons of co-operation and group planning. Many different programs will be reported in subsequent pages. Limitations of time and space preclude full reports on all. Those selected have significance in showing some special adaptation, use of technique, or plan of organization.

### THE CALIFORNIA CONGRESS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS POINTS A WAY

#### *What Was the Problem?*

The Board of Managers of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers believed that educational interests in California were confronted with two problems: (1) How could state educational organizations work together to build better understanding between home and school? and (2) How could their efforts be used to stimulate co-operative projects in the various urban and rural communities throughout the state?

#### *What Was Done about It?*

The California Congress of Parents and Teachers called together representatives of four state-wide organizations to discuss the problem. The organizations represented were the State Department of Education, the California Teachers Association, the California Association of School Administrators, and the California School Trustees Association. The groups decided to sponsor conferences on home-school relations, under the leadership of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.

Five conferences have been held. The first two were at the University of California at Berkeley in the summers of 1947 and 1948. The third conference was at the University of California at Los Angeles in August, 1949. The 1950 conference



was held at Stanford University. In February, 1951, the fifth conference met in San Diego.

### *How Was the 1949 Conference on Home-School Relations Organized?*

The 1949 conference was typical and may be used as illustrative. The School of Education of the University of California and the five state organizations mentioned above sponsored the conference. The Department of Institutes of the University made the arrangements for the meetings, which were held over a four-day period.

Attendance was by invitation. The conference members were divided into four small discussion groups made up almost equally of parents and teachers. Leaders, consultants, and recorders for the study groups represented the sponsoring organizations. The final day of the conference was devoted to a general meeting in which the findings of the sections, suggestions for implementing the findings, and general conclusions were considered by the entire group.

### *What Happened at the Conference?*

A hundred people discussed the central theme, "Reporting to Parents."

Opportunities were offered to observe and define techniques which could be used to set up similar conferences in local communities. Agreement was reached on the following points:

1. Parents and teachers do not learn to work together by studying books about co-operation, but by actually working together on problems of mutual concern.
2. Many opportunities exist for local parent-teacher associations to build understanding between home and school by (a) setting up community participation conferences; (b) paving the way for individual teacher-parent conferences; (c) interpreting the general school program; (d) sponsoring grade-level meetings; (e) helping make parents feel at home during school visits.
3. Reporting to parents could become a modern freeway to good communication between home and school.

4. Improvements in public schools must be planned and developed by parents and teachers working together.
5. Schools in each community must make their own progress toward improvement.
6. No set procedure or pattern can be effective for all.

### *What Made the Conference Succeed?*

Focusing the attention of the representatives of various groups on a specific problem contributed to the success of the conference. The fact that sufficient time was allowed for the development of solutions to problems was a second significant factor.

The choice of "Reporting to Parents" as the theme was conducive to interested discussion because in no other area can greater opportunity be found for building co-operation and understanding between home and school.

### *What Did Participants Say About the Conference?*

The following were typical reactions to the conference.

*A school principal:* "This conference has shown me how parent conferences can build better understanding in my own community."

*A member of the parent-teacher association:* "I see that home and school need definite projects on which to work together."

*A school trustee:* "I believe that a conference like this would be valuable in my community. It is a good project for school people and parents because it benefits children."

## AN EDUCATION COUNCIL AWAKENS A COMMUNITY TO SCHOOL NEEDS

### *What Was the Problem?*

Leaders in a typical California community were saying: "Children and youth must be prepared for life in a complex world." "Action must be taken to meet this problem in each community." "Before we can improve our schools we must know about them." "This responsibility cannot be side-stepped!"

A group of active citizens in the town accepted the responsibility of helping the public to inform itself on the needs of the school. As a result of their concern, the Wide-Awake Education Council was formed.

### *How Was the Council Organized?*

Forty-nine civic organizations, including all the local units of the parent-teacher association, accepted an invitation issued by a small group of interested citizens to appoint representatives to a community-wide organization. An executive board of thirteen members was selected to carry on the work between meetings.

### *Who Belongs to the Council?*

The following representation was provided:

Each local unit of the parent-teacher association organized in the individual schools sends a representative to the council.

Each school sends a representative from its educational staff.

Each organization in the community which has public education as an interest appoints a representative to the council.

Individuals who are interested in the schools, and who are willing to help with the work of the Education Council are cordially urged to become members-at-large.

### *What Are the Duties of the Representatives of Organizations?*

Each representative agrees to attend meetings of the Council and assist in making plans for the most effective accomplishment of the purposes for which the Council is organized; to report to his organization the activities and plans of the Council; to act as publicity agent by announcing to his group well in advance each public meeting which the Council is sponsoring; to take responsibility for spreading interest and seeing that a good representation of his group is in each audience; to bring to the community information about the activities of his organization for the promotion of better community support of schools.

*What Are the Purposes of the Council?*

The major purpose of the Council is to seek answers to questions such as the following:

1. What do we want for our children and youth?
2. How can home, school, church, and community work together to get what we want?
3. What are the experts saying about education in 1951?
4. What are good schools doing?
5. How good are our schools?
6. How could co-operative effort improve them?

The Council also serves to open channels of communication between various groups within the community and thus builds understanding of common problems.

*How Has the Council Worked?*

The Council has planned and held meetings on topics of concern to both home and school. These meetings were led by persons well qualified in their fields. From 200 to 700 people have attended meetings. Some of the topics discussed were the following:

What the School Needs from the Parents

What the Parents Need from the School

How Can a Community Attract and Hold Good Teachers?

Are Shop Courses Needed in College Preparatory Training?

Reporting to Parents

The Need for a Local Bond Issue

Is Discipline the Answer to Our Youth Problems?

What Should the Community Do for the Family?

The Council has organized special committees for continuing study on Counseling and Guidance, Teacher-Community Relations, Youth Participation in Community Life, School Finance, Radio Programs, Problems of Family Living.

The Council has planned and completed a community survey. A questionnaire on "What do the people of Wide-Awake want their schools to do for their children?" was submitted to

parents, teachers, and children in the schools, as well as to members of civic groups and citizens at large. The findings have been used in planning programs and have stimulated great interest.

### *What Has Happened?*

*The Tangible Outcomes.* An election to raise the school tax rate was held in 1947. The proposal passed by a large majority.

An election for a bond issue for school buildings was held in 1948. It was approved by a large vote.

A Family Service Center was established in 1948.

*The Intangibles.* The special talents and interests of capable persons in the community have been utilized in constructive ways. Persons of different ages and ways of living have profited by having opportunities to know each other. Persons working in different areas of the educational system and in public and private schools have come to understand that they share many problems and responsibilities. All are agreed that "Education Is Our Business."

### TUCKED-AWAY SCHOOL MEETS COMMUNITY NEEDS

#### *What Was the Problem?*

A teacher of the Tucked-Away School made the comment which follows:

I stopped by the Lopez house yesterday afternoon to see if Joe could go to the radio station with the class. I knocked several times and heard people inside, but no one came to the door. I like Joe, and have never been cross with him. I guess they are just unfriendly people.

And Mrs. Lopez said to her husband:

Joe's teacher came today but I did not let her in. Joe is a good boy. I do not like the teachers to say that he always makes trouble.

This incident reflects the lack of understanding between parents and teachers of the Tucked-Away School. These suspicions were part of a general pattern of mistrust.

Although Anglo- and Mexican-Americans had lived peaceably side-by-side in the little community for many years, each group had kept to itself. Both were low-income groups. They met

similar problems, the children attended the same school, but there was no "neighboring," no friendly exchange of recipes or freedom to borrow a cup of sugar or a little flour. The Browns "knew" that it was the Hernandez boy who broke down their fence, and Mrs. Sanchez was "certain" that Billy Jones had raided her chicken house. These feelings, however, did not erupt into any overt action.

The tensions engendered by this state of armed truce were intensified when the migrant workers, who were both Anglo- and Mexican-Americans, came in to pick the fruit and walnuts. The longer-established residents in both groups disliked and looked down on the transient workers.

The school was the one force available for unifying the community. The teachers liked the children and tried to plan sound educational experiences for them, but frequently felt frustrated and baffled when well-meant efforts to build co-operation met with failure. The teachers knew little about the structure of the community.

#### *What Was Done About It?*

The superintendent and teachers of the Tucked-Away School did the following things:

1. *Recognized the problem.* The failure of school and community to work together had allowed cleavages to become a part of the cultural pattern of the community. The school had a responsibility to take leadership in building confidence in its program and personnel, and to help persons from the different groups in the community to recognize the mutuality of their problems.
2. *Looked for the causes.* The tensions in the community constituted the major element in the problem. While most of the permanent residents had steady jobs, many families had to struggle to meet the rent or house payments, clothe the children, and provide in a modest way for the future.

The lack of information on the part of the school people regarding the cultural background and the economic status of the community was recognized.



The crowded condition of the school prevented teachers from giving children the needed individual guidance.

Contacts between home and school had usually involved the reporting of unpleasant incidents such as breaches of discipline.

Unpleasant experiences in other schools had conditioned the children of seasonal workers to be defensive and truculent.

3. *Built friendly attitudes between home and school.* The teachers looked for opportunities to send cheerful messages to parents or to visit the homes on pleasant errands. The following messages were typical:

"I thought you would like to know how well Helen sang for the group today."

"You would have been proud of the way Arnaldo helped two friends of his settle a squabble without fighting."

"Carmen is doing much better in her arithmetic. Come to school someday and let her show you."

"The class likes to give responsible jobs to Billy because he is dependable."

4. *Established a "well-baby" clinic.* Teachers, doctor and nurse worked together to make the "well-baby" clinic succeed. They tried to make the most timid mother feel welcome. The teachers met and mingled with the mothers and helped the nurse write up the reports.
5. *Started a Mothers' Club.* The women of the community needed opportunities to become acquainted with each other and to participate in social activities. Most of them had never been members of any club or organization before. They needed to build confidence in their ability to work together in their school before they were ready for participation in larger and more complex activities.

#### *How Did the Mothers' Club Build Understanding?*

The first meeting of the Mothers' Club was a social tea following a school program at which all groups in the community

were represented. The friendly attitudes engendered by the experiences at the "well-baby" clinic were important factors in encouraging participation in the Mothers' Club. Mothers were elected as officers of the club.

The name selected by the group was "The Help One Another Club." Club business was conducted in both English and Spanish. The younger women among the Mexican-American group served as interpreters. Several of these mothers had finished high school and their husbands had good positions or small business ventures. Their standards were the same as those of the Anglo-American group.

#### *How Did the Club Operate?*

The work of the club was carried on through two committees, one a social and the other a ways and means committee.

*The work of the Social Committee.* The Social Committee arranged parties on special holidays. Christmas was celebrated with songs, stories, and an exchange of gifts; Thanksgiving was observed with a program entitled "Why Thanksgiving?" and an offering by adults and children of canned fruit and vegetables for the needy; a valentine party was held just for fun, with simple games of musical chairs and spin-the-platter, puzzles, and prizes.

Planned monthly programs included an arts and crafts exhibit to which a teacher from the county hospital brought many articles made by her students. This teacher had traveled widely in Mexico and loved Mexican people. Plays, piano and vocal selections, poems, verse choir numbers, and folk dancing were presented for the mothers by the children. Films were shown regularly; especially popular were the films showing life in Mexico and those on health topics.

The Social Committee promoted co-operative projects such as a carnival, rummage sales, and hobby exhibits.

Light refreshments were served at all meetings. The last meeting of the year featured a delicious Mexican dinner prepared and served by all the club mothers.

*The work of the Ways and Means Committee.* Club expenses were financed through the sale of sewing and fancy work. Materials for children's clothes, layettes, aprons, and embroidery were bought by the committee. The garments were planned and cut with the greatest economy in the use of material.

Each mother chose the type of handwork she wished to do. If her work was not finished at the meeting, the article was taken home. All finished work was returned to the club. If any mother wanted to keep her own piece of work, she paid only for the actual cost of the materials. The price was kept low by careful shopping and by remodeling of used materials.

Many mothers made beautiful embroidery and articles of clothing which they donated to the club. These were sold at special sales to raise money for school needs.

#### *What Has Happened?*

Mothers and teachers are friendly and have confidence in one another. They share homemaking ideas, exchange recipes, admire each other's sewing, knitting, crocheting, and embroidery.

School discipline has improved with the increased co-operation between home and school. Parents now visit the school. Community health has improved.

Parents assist in the school program by providing transportation for study trips, collecting material for the school museum, helping with hobby shows, serving as referee for games.

The increased co-operation between home and school has built better understanding among the parents of the community. The school has provided ways of working together, and both Anglo- and Mexican-American groups have responded in friendly fashion.

The opportunity to contribute through sharing the skills of homemaking was an important factor in the success of the project.

This is what the community members say now: "We want to help each other." "We will have Mothers' Club next year." "Perhaps soon we can join the big Parent-Teacher Association."

## FAST-GROWING COUNTY LAUNCHES A PROGRAM OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

### *The Problem*

The schools of Fast-Growing County were planning a program of curriculum development that would result in the publication of a new guidebook for the teachers in the county. The county board of education and the supervisory staff were concerned that the revision should meet the changing needs of the area and be in harmony with educational trends elsewhere in the State.

### *What Was Done about It?*

The county board of education called a meeting which included the staff members of all the elementary and secondary schools, the faculty of the local college and junior college, and representatives of community and professional organizations within the area.

The meeting was addressed by members of the State Department of Education, who discussed the implications of the *California Framework for Public Education*<sup>1</sup> for the elementary and secondary schools of Fast-Growing County. These presentations were followed by discussion in small "buzz" groups organized in the audience. Each buzz group was asked to turn in a comment or question for discussion by a panel. The panel included elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators, community representatives, and students. Following discussion by members of the panel, the audience was asked to make further comments or suggestions to the curriculum director of the county school department.

These suggestions were tabulated and used as a basis for other meetings. They also influenced the work of the regional study groups that were organized to carry forward the program for curriculum development. The community was invited to

<sup>1</sup> A guide for education in California, developed 1946-49 by the co-operative work of many professional and community groups throughout the state, issued in several preliminary working drafts, and published in final form as *A Framework for Public Education in California*, prepared by the California Framework Committee, A Committee Appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction at the Request of the State Curriculum Commission. Bulletin of the California State Department of Education, Vol. XIX, No. 6, November, 1950.

continue its participation in the production of the curricular materials, which will be published in the teachers guide for use in all schools of Fast-Growing County.

## SECOND GRADE PARENTS STUDY AN EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM

### *The Problem*

The schools of Comingalong taught manuscript writing in the primary grades. The population was changing rapidly and children entered from schools where cursive writing had been taught. Some of the parents were critical of the educational program and the irritation focused on the question of manuscript versus cursive writing.

### *What Was Done about It?*

The principal and the teachers of three second grades asked the parents to attend a meeting where the problem would be discussed. The county school supervisor was present. The group discussed the problem. All persons who wished to speak were given a courteous and complete hearing.

A committee composed of teachers, parents, and the supervisor was selected to study the subject and make reports at a future meeting. Three meetings were necessary to complete these reports. The meetings were cordial and friendly, refreshments were served, and an effort was made to create a welcoming atmosphere, especially for persons new in the community.

At the final meeting the group had come to agree that manuscript was preferable to cursive writing for young children. The school's program was strengthened by the understanding and the enthusiasm that the series of meetings had developed.

## OTHERS ORGANIZE FOR ACTION IN VARIOUS WAYS

### *Getting the Ball Rolling*

The principal of a three-teacher school in a rural area mobilized an indifferent community to action by working on a holiday to tear down an old barn that was an eyesore on the school grounds. Four or five passersby pitched in to help. As a

result of their conversation the School Improvement Committee was formed.

A "Work Round-Up" was sponsored and the school was renovated inside and out, the grounds were leveled, and the play areas improved. Pot-luck suppers served at the work sessions resulted in a friendly feeling, and semi-weekly folk-dancing groups for parents and children were organized.

This friendliness spread to include a group of fifteen children who belonged in the school district but who had transferred out of the school because it was not readily accessible from the trailer court in which they lived. Transportation was provided for the group, which was re-enrolled, and the parents and children from the court are now included in the many projects and activities which center in the school.

### *Asking For Help*

When two factions were at odds about the school program, the administrator called an open meeting and invited all the groups in the community to attend. A professor from a nearby college was invited to serve as chairman of the meeting. He opened the discussion by asking both groups to list the things they wanted for their children. Thirty-seven items were listed, most of them held important by persons in both factions. All realized they had a program for common action.

Improvement of the school grounds was the first joint project. Groups donated labor and material and the play areas were improved at no cost to the school. Other projects followed. Working together resulted in better understanding, and three bond issues have been passed by large majorities.

In this case most of the community leaders had already taken sides on the issue. Bringing in as chairman an outsider of considerable prestige, who had the respect of both factions and could be impartial, was the deciding factor in the satisfactory settlement of the controversy.

### *Providing for Service*

For fifteen years the parents' group and the school staff of one school have organized an annual community campaign to



raise money for the school lunch program and to pay for special materials and recreation equipment for the school. An auction is held early in the fall. Everyone helps. Booths for the sale of food and embroidery are set up. Professional auctioneers donate their services, a barbecue supper is served, and the school provides entertainment for the crowds, which grow larger every year.

### *Building Agreement*

Several school districts, upon reorganization into a unified district, found that they faced new problems. The superintendent of schools and the county school supervisor whom he had assigned to the district organized meetings so that the people could discuss these problems and reach the agreements essential to sound co-operative action.

Some of the questions discussed were the following:

What important things should be considered in developing the district building program?

How many children should there be in a classroom?

Is there a need of one high school or two?

Should the seventh- and eighth-grade children stay in their local schools or be transported to the high school?

What kind of person do you want your child to become?

These and other important questions were discussed by small study committees. Progress reports of the findings were made in frequent larger meetings. A program for united community action is in process.

### *Facing the Problem*

The growing pains of one community on the fringe of a war-expanded city were extremely severe. People from all groups and all parts of the country had flocked in. They had been uprooted; they were poorly housed, unknown, and unwelcomed. For many this was their first experience in city life.

Community organization through the schools could improve these conditions, but the schools were overcrowded and

not staffed to meet the acute and immediate problems. Additional help was essential.

The Rosenberg Foundation paid the salary of a community worker for a two-year period. She worked in the schools and with the families, encouraged recreation programs, organized a parents' club, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, Cub Packs and Brownies, as well as Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A. groups.

The schools provided the centers for community organization. Youth groups already organized in the longer-settled parts of the city extended their services. Leadership within the community was encouraged.

Now the people say, "We still have problems, but we know we can do something about them."

### *Helping Dreams Come True*

The principal of the school called together seven mothers and asked them to dream about the things they would like to have for their community. Although the community was one geographically, its three separate little community centers competed for prestige. As a result, no one had anything—"only a few beer and liquor joints and fights galore."

Through the efforts of the principal, the dreams of the mothers were combined in a plan that enlisted the interest of the Rosenberg Foundation and resulted in a grant of funds for the employment of a community worker. Separate civic groups and a co-ordinating council were formed.

Transportation, health facilities, and fire protection have been improved. Land has been donated for a recreation center. A community building has been erected. The three community centers, working together, entered a float in a parade held in a nearby city and won the prize. The co-ordinating council won the Rotary Club trophy for outstanding community service.

### *Establishing Parent-Education Classes*

Parent-education classes, sponsored by the parent-teacher association, financed through adult education funds, and closely linked to school programs have been successful channels for

co-operation in many places. These are especially effective when combined with classroom visitation, which can form the basis for discussion in the class hour.

### *Utilizing Many Resources*

An extensive program of parent education was carried on in one large county by a traveling group made up of representatives from the parent-teacher association and the Youth Authority and local educators who led meetings in six different centers during the period of a week. These meetings resulted in the formation of smaller study groups in local units.

### *Building Acceptance for a New Program*

The principal and teachers of a small elementary school wished to do away with the formal-type report card that had been a tradition of the school for many years. They first met together and agreed upon a form of reporting based on conferences with parents. They submitted this plan to a small group of community leaders and received their support. This group was also asked to help make definite plans for the organization and content of the conferences. The complete plans were submitted to the total membership of the parent-teacher association and were discussed with the farm group and other organizations interested in the school program. Thus public understanding and acceptance was built before the new program was started.

### *Studying the Total Curriculum*

Many groups built increased understanding of the school program through the "Teaching Citizenship" project. This project was sponsored by the California Association of School Trustees, the California Teachers Association, and the California Association of School Administrators, under the leadership of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.

The same groups are sponsoring a new study on "Teaching the Basic Skills," which has great promise of success. A study guide is provided and helps for planning are available. Information about this program has been sent to the presidents of the local branches of the parent-teacher association.

### *Helping Young People Build Social Standards*

In one community, the pupils, parents, and educators are working together to build understanding and agreement on questions vital to teen-age youth. Each year parents are asked to list a group of problems for discussion. The following are typical problems.

What is acceptable conduct at a party?

Is dating suitable for seventh-graders?

Should parties be given during the week?

At what time should parties end?

These problems are referred to a panel of three boys and three girls, who discuss them in an open meeting before all the pupils of the class. When the panel completes its considerations, discussion is invited from the floor. These results and reactions are presented to the parents in an evening meeting planned so that fathers and mothers can both be present.

The parents then try to establish standards of behavior with which all can comply. Copies of parent and student reaction are mailed to all parents with a letter stating the conclusions reached. This attempt to have all parents co-operate on approximately the same standards helps the pupils to maintain acceptable behavior in social situations.

### *Stirring Things Up*

The parent-teacher association of a small rural school wished to build greater interest in the curriculum. The principal was asked to hold a meeting to discuss what the school was doing, how various subjects were taught, and reasons for changes in school practices.

At the first meeting the group listed the specific things they wanted to know about teaching reading, the social studies, and other subjects in the curriculum. These interests were used as a basis for future meetings.

At first the principal and teachers were reluctant to have the meetings, but they are now convinced of their value in building support and understanding of a good school program.

### *Thanking the People*

The school newspaper builds good home-school relations in one rural school. The paper, which is mimeographed, follows standards of good journalism and is attractively decorated in color before it is sent home. Care is taken that items of interest to parents as well as to pupils are included. One column is used to thank persons who have contributed to school welfare; thus, Mrs. Jones, who took a group of children to visit the county courthouse, is given recognition for this service to the school.

### GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

The preceding reports show many ways in which school and community work together for the welfare of youth. All these programs recognize the fact that the public schools are established to educate all the children of all the people, and all the people must be included in opportunities offered to consider policies and practices affecting the welfare of their children. An honest recognition of this fact is basic to success.

Also basic are these hints to those who wish to be successful leaders of group endeavor:

Involve as many as possible in the initial planning. Everyone likes to be in on the ground floor.

Keep everyone informed of the progress of events. No one likes to find out by accident.

Provide for wide participation. Everyone likes a finger in the pie.

Cut the jobs to do-able size. The words "We did it" are great morale builders.

Help the group plan its program to suit local needs. Learn from the neighbors, but don't copy them.

Celebrate the triumphs. A discreet blowing of the collective horn never hurt an organization, but be sure the glory is well distributed.

## A SCHOOL-COMMUNITY SURVEY

EDWARD C. BRITTON, *Assistant Professor of Education,  
Sacramento State College*

How can teachers and community plan together to meet the needs of children? This article describes one method by which this was done on an extensive scale. Guidelines to effective action are suggested.

The people of a small town in the Sacramento Valley were not much interested in their schools. They suspected in a vague way that more could be done for children. Criticism of teachers was common at tea parties and clubs. However, there was more indifference than concern.

The county superintendent of schools felt that both schools and community could be doing a much better job of meeting children's needs. She appointed a member of her staff to work on the problem.

This school supervisor visited informally with the elementary and high school principals and with three prominent and popular community leaders who had demonstrated a high interest in working with children. Each agreed that there was a real need for a study to see how school and community could do a better job. All were then invited to a meeting in the supervisor's office. They decided to sponsor a larger meeting to which would be invited twenty of the town's community leaders. The supervisor conveyed the group's invitation to each leader personally and all attended. This group decided that a survey of school and community should be conducted to see how well children's needs were being met.

Another meeting was called to which other leaders were invited. Here it was decided to examine the needs of children in several problem areas:

- |               |                |               |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1. recreation | 4. economics   | 7. minorities |
| 2. government | 5. religion    | 8. welfare    |
| 3. health     | 6. delinquency | 9. curriculum |



Committee chairmen were appointed to look into each of these problem areas and these chairmen, working with the supervisor, invited representatives of school and community to join the committees.

These committees conducted meetings over a period of several months. The supervisor acted as secretary for each group. The average attendance at meetings was ten. Each committee attacked its problem in a different way.

The work of the committee on economics illustrates one approach. The local Chamber of Commerce nominated the members of this committee. Twelve prominent civic leaders were appointed. The school principals and the county superintendent of schools were represented on this as on all committees. The committee on economic problems devoted its first meeting to a discussion of how well the schools were preparing youth for taking jobs. All members had definite points of view based on limited observations. Concern was expressed over the failure of many students to prove satisfactory when given employment. It was recognized that perhaps the employers were failing in some ways.

Need for more information was evident from the discussions, so the supervisor drafted a questionnaire to gather the facts needed. Copies were presented for evaluation at the next meeting and the members suggested revisions. They agreed to help administer the questionnaire to representative businessmen. This proved a stimulating and enlightening experience. Forty-five questionnaires were completed and tabulated. They formed the basis for discussion at the next few meetings during which representatives of school and business planned ways of meeting the problems indicated. Out of the meetings came the following actions:

1. Proposals were made that led to the revision of the eighth and ninth grade social studies courses. Units on vocations were added. Businessmen visited the schools to discuss their work and pupils visited the places of business.
2. A Junior Employment Service was established with the co-operation of the local employment office. Care was taken

to get the right student in the right job and the school counseled both employer and employee when necessary. The service applied to elementary school pupils seeking part-time and summer employment.

3. Attention was given to housing problems as a factor in keeping the graduates in the community. Another Chamber of Commerce committee followed up this problem.
4. A series of lectures on improving local business was sponsored by the adult education department. These were well attended and marked the beginning of an extensive program of improvement of local business opportunities.
5. A marked increase in confidence in the schools was apparent. Many misunderstandings were cleared away. The businessmen appreciated the willingness of the school people to discuss basic issues freely. Community leaders recognized that these discussions meant the school personnel had confidence in the sincerity and ability of socially minded citizens. The schools appreciated the new rapport that was established with the community. All of these factors were reflected in a better school and community environment for children and youth.

Other committees attacked their problems in different ways. The committee on recreation administered detailed questionnaires to the students and found evidence of a real need for further community recreational opportunities. They held community meetings to report the findings and to get solutions. As one result, these student representatives met with the committee and a student delegation visited other schools of the county to discuss possibilities of a county-wide recreation program. A county youth committee was formed and met twice. The discussions of this body resulted in the initiation of several local recreation projects rather than a single county-wide effort.

The committee on welfare discovered a pressing need for the co-ordination of the welfare activities of the several organizations with responsibilities in this field. This was effected through the appointment of a special permanent committee by the town co-ordinating council.

All committees considered the implications for the school curriculum in the problems discussed. The meetings were a source of stimulation and new ideas for the teachers and the means of deeper insight for the community representatives who participated. Committee members went back to the parent-teacher association with their findings and the P.T.A. programs for the following year were based on them. A large number of parents were thus included in a new approach to their schools.

The newspapers gave full coverage to reports of committee activities. Group meetings of teachers with the parents of their pupils, a series of 24 radio programs on education, and numerous community club meetings based on educational themes were other outcomes of the activities of the survey committees.

All who participated in the meetings were convinced that the rewards involved were well worth the effort required to overcome the difficulties of dealing with overworked teachers and indifferent parents and the shortage of qualified leadership. All were convinced that they had just begun to tap the possibilities of school and community co-operation in meeting the needs of children.

#### GUIDELINES TO SCHOOL-COMMUNITY SELF-SURVEYS

The following suggestions based on this experience are presented in outline form for greater brevity.

##### A. Selection of Committee Members

1. Committees should include some accepted leaders who bring high status to the project and also some less prominent members who bring another point of view and who have more time to do the work involved in the operation of the committee.
2. Youth should be part of the school-community team. Where possible, youth should be included from the beginning of the project, but the stage at which they enter the committee will vary with different communities. One factor to be considered would be the amount of previous experience the young people and

adults of the community have had in working together. Another factor would be the willingness of teachers to plan with youth.

3. Committees should include professional workers in the subject area being studied. The purpose of the study is to develop co-operation among the various people working to meet the needs of youth; it is not to criticize them. Co-operation will be developed most effectively when committees include those in a position to co-operate.
4. Committees should include officers in local voluntary organizations who will be able to help in carrying the recommendations through to the action stage.
5. Committee chairmen should have sufficient time available to meet the responsibilities of the position. When they are invited to take the chair, they should be made aware of the time that will be required and should not be overpersuaded if they feel they are too busy.
6. A careful balance between the influence of school and community representatives should be maintained; neither should dominate.
7. Committees may be sponsored by some appropriate community group. The sponsoring group should be in a position to act on the committee's recommendations. Where membership in a sponsoring organization is limited to one social group the organization should invite outside persons to serve on the committee.
8. A meeting of fifteen members is apparently the optimum size. The director at first thought that this would be too large but experience indicated that this number could work together effectively to solve problems. A great advantage was found in having many points of view represented in all considerations.

#### B. Motivation

1. Committee members must be so convinced of the importance of the project that they are willing to take

time from other activities in order to ensure the project's success.

2. Arrangements for post-meeting refreshments and dinner meetings are valuable in establishing a friendly working relationship among the committee members. This is of special importance when young people are included on committees.
3. Extensive use should be made of all forms of publicity. The community should be aware that a survey is in progress and should expect the committee to produce results. Results should be given the widest possible publicity.
4. Letters from the director and chairman may be an effective means of introducing prospective members to the purposes of the committee. They are also valuable in maintaining interest in the project. A brief letter accompanied by the minutes of the previous meeting is a good way of announcing the next session.

#### C. Effective Meetings

1. The presentation of well-prepared proposals for action developed by interested groups and leaders contributes to purposeful meetings.
2. Reference material may be an effective aid to certain committees. This is especially true of a committee dealing with some less familiar subject such as juvenile delinquency. Brief pamphlets are available and they are more likely to be read than longer references.

#### D. Fact-finding Techniques

1. Questionnaires and interviews are valuable in gathering information on which to base plans.
2. Fact finding should be kept brief. Committees sometimes wish to launch into complicated fact-finding programs in which they cannot possibly succeed. Often an action program can be based on small, but carefully-gathered, statistical evidence.

3. A preliminary draft of a questionnaire may be prepared by the secretary on the basis of questions raised in general discussion at meetings. The questionnaire should then be modified by a small group and by the committee as a whole in order to ensure that it represents the thinking of all the members.
4. Publicity about the purposes of the survey is a help to those administering questionnaires. It gives the interviewer increased status and makes the interviewee more willing to co-operate.

#### E. The Curriculum Emphasis

1. Attention should be given to the curricular implications of each topic examined. It is easy to miss this in the work of such committees as that on recreation.

#### F. The Time Factor

1. For any committee a minimum of five meetings is necessary for consideration of the subject. In addition to meetings, the members should spend several hours in directed reading, conducting interviews, and associated activities.
2. Teachers and administrators should be released from other scheduled responsibilities, where possible, to give them time to prepare for and attend meetings. When a school has a policy of allowing released time for curriculum meetings the problem should be simple, since the survey may be properly considered as curriculum work.
3. More satisfactory results are achieved when the committee delays action until it completes the survey rather than when it leaves the survey unfinished and devotes all of its energy to implementing the first proposal for action that is encountered.
4. When a group in the community is already working effectively on the problem assigned to a committee,



generally more will be gained if the committee supports the existing group than if it sets up a parallel investigation.

#### G. State Assistance

Out-of-county agencies, such as the California Youth Authority, the California Recreation Commission, and the State Department of Education should be called upon for assistance when necessary. Representatives of such agencies can present problems to the committee in a challenging manner, indicate possible solutions, assist with fact-finding techniques, and provide data discovered in their own research.

## PARENTS VISIT THE CLASSROOM

ROBERT E. GIBSON, *General Supervisor of Instruction,  
Shasta County*

Classroom observation by parents is one of the most successful means of achieving effective home-school relations. Parents frequently are attracted to the school by a request to attend some special event, such as a program, conference, open house, or exhibit. Seldom does a parent come to the classroom to spend all or part of a day observing how the teacher carries on the classroom program and how the child responds to the classroom and total school environment. So uncommon is this activity that teacher, parent, and child fail to react properly to it. Some teachers have resented such seeming intrusion upon their domain. Parents have felt a strained relationship, and as a result of this unfriendly feeling, they have been critical of modern school methods and results, largely upon an emotional basis. If parents actually come into classrooms to observe their children at work, criticism is likely to be less subjective and destructive.

### AN EXPERIMENT IN CLASSROOM VISITATION AND OBSERVATION

In order to study more effective methods of improving home-school relations through the medium of parents' visits and observation in classrooms, an experiment was conducted in the second grade of a four-room elementary school in a mountain area. Because such visiting was a relatively new procedure, except for the occasional haphazard appearance of a parent in the classroom, it was felt that an initial experience should be planned for a group of parents which would create a lively interest, bring parents and teachers together in discussion of common problems, and develop greater understanding of the need for a closer working relationship. From this beginning it was hoped that a real program of individual visits could grow.

The second-grade teacher had a warm, friendly personality which manifested itself in her relations with other people, especially with her pupils and their parents. She already knew the parents of her children, but sought to increase her contacts with all parents as soon as school started in the fall in order to discuss with the individual parents the welfare and progress of each child.

Throughout the fall and early winter the second-grade program had been moving in the direction of greater activities and a unified approach. The teacher felt the need for more understanding of these developments on the part of parents. After considerable advance planning for a unit on the post office, she discussed with her children the advisability of inviting their parents to school all day to observe their beginning of the study of this public service. The children were enthusiastic about the idea. Co-operatively they wrote a letter to their parents. Each pupil secured a stamped envelope from the principal, enclosed his letter, addressed it to his parents and then went with the teacher to the post office to mail it.

#### *Planning the Program for Observation by Parents*

If all the parents came there would be a roomful. Chairs for 25 had to be arranged conveniently about the room on the evening before the visit. A committee of pupils was responsible for this. Other committees were selected for welcoming parents when they arrived, for taking their coats and overshoes, for darkening the room in order to show film strips bearing on the study in progress, for arranging the library table, for pinning various visual materials about the room and for escorting their parents to the lunchroom at noon. Considerable time was spent in the discussion of the respective duties, much stress being laid on the importance of courtesy and respect. The teacher discussed with the class how they might behave with the room full of parents, and how difficult it would be to show the parents how they worked if they were going to be distracted by the presence of visitors. As a result of this discussion the children decided that

if their parents were to see much, each child needed to be as helpful and thoughtful of the others and of the teacher as possible. With the teacher guiding, the children drew up their rules of conduct.

In order that observation by the parents should not be haphazard, the following list of questions for their consideration was developed by the teacher, the principal, and the county school supervisor.

#### PARENT'S EVALUATION OF CLASSROOM VISIT

*(Please give your critical opinion)*

1. What things are going on in the room that particularly impress you?
2. How valuable are the things the teacher is emphasizing?
3. What do you think of the way discipline is handled?
4. What do you think of the way your child behaves in school?
5. What do you think your child is learning?
6. Is your child interested in what is going on?
7. How does your child seem to get along with his teacher? With the other children?
8. Is your child busy or wasting his time?
9. In what ways could you help the teacher and the children in their study of the post office in order to make it a better learning situation for your child and all the other children?
10. Please add any remarks you would like to make about your visit.

#### *The Parents Visit the School*

When school opened on the morning of the observation, all but two mothers were in attendance. One of these was ill and the other was working. Even a father had taken a day off from his work to be there. As parents arrived, the welcoming committee met them at the entrance to the school and took them to the classroom where the "wraps committee" took charge, hanging up coats and showing people to their seats, in accordance with the rules of behavior which the children had developed.

The parents spent the morning watching with great interest the initiation of the unit on the post office. They saw all the school subjects utilized in the study. While the class had learned not to be disturbed by adults coming into the room, it should not be inferred that no artificiality was apparent in such a situation.

It was unusual for the children to have visitors watching them. The parents realized this and in their evaluation agreed that a more effective visit would be made by an individual or smaller groups. However, all agreed that the group visit was an excellent device for encouraging individual visits.

Before the day's program started, each parent was handed one of the evaluation sheets. The teacher explained that this list of questions might help them to observe more thoughtfully and carefully, that in the afternoon these points might form the basis for discussion and further evaluation, and that their ideas would be helpful in developing the future educational program for their children.

All the parents were guests of the school in the cafeteria during the noon hour. The children of the fifth-sixth grade room served the parents the regular school lunch. The lunch period provided an opportunity for parents to become better acquainted, and for teacher, principal, supervisor, and parents to discuss children and education informally. After lunch all parents were invited to a room where chairs had been arranged in a circle, and for the next hour the principal and the general supervisor led a discussion in which all took part and which resulted in further valuable exchange of ideas. The teacher was not present during this discussion. An experience with parents visiting in a fifth-sixth grade class the following week led to the conclusion that it is better to have the teacher take part in the discussion. The teacher and the parents are the ones most directly concerned and in the interest of improving their relationships the program of parent-teacher observation and evaluation should be a joint undertaking throughout.

#### *Parents Evaluate Their Visit*

According to their evaluation, the features of the program which particularly impressed the parents were:

1. The orderliness, attentiveness, and keen interest of the children
2. The regard which the children showed for one another as evidenced in many specific responses

3. The excellent discipline which prevailed. Several parents stated, "Discipline is simply no problem at all." The fact that discipline was a group matter and was seldom imposed in this classroom provided an opportunity for these parents to distinguish between self-discipline and imposed discipline
4. The patience and deep understanding shown by the teacher
5. The teaching of "fundamentals" through the children's own interests and experiences
6. Sharing of ideas and making of plans by the children
7. Evidence that the children were learning to think better

Instead of thinking that the tool subjects were being neglected, the parents believed that, by learning them through the activities approach, their children were learning them in a more interesting and practical way. As one parent wrote: "Learning can be fun and related to everyday life." Another commented, "It stimulates thinking and closer observation. Makes teamwork necessary." Only one parent mentioned that more individual instruction in reading and more phonics were needed. All expressed appreciation that their children were acquiring attitudes, habits, and understandings as well as the three R's.

Generally the parents thought they could stimulate their children's learning as a result of their classroom observation. After finding out what materials were to be used and how the teacher approached learning situations, parents realized that each could help the child by taking greater interest in what he was doing at school, by asking questions, by making meanings clearer when necessary, and by supplying additional information. Parents wanted to be informed about the projects being conducted at school in order that they might be better able to help the teacher and children. The parents suggested several ways in which they could be kept informed. The teacher or the principal might send home periodic letters telling about the activities that were going on. The class might learn to make such reports a part of their written language work to take home to



their parents a description of classroom activities. One parent said, "The children might practice among themselves how they could tell their parents about their projects and activities at school. In this way children would receive valuable experience in oral expression and parents would be kept better informed." Finally, however, they reached the conclusion that if they were to give such help, they must come to school and visit more frequently.

When the principal asked if the parents wanted to visit again during the progress of this unit, all agreed that they would like to come back. The principal suggested that they visit the classroom unannounced as they would be able to obtain a better picture of the situation. He suggested that if parents did this more frequently, the children would get used to visitors and not be so conscious of their presence. Every parent agreed to come back during the next two months and spend a half day. The parents believed that it would be a good idea after visiting a class to talk to the teacher and get her point of view as well as to learn more about the growth and adjustment of their children.

#### PARENTS OF FIFTH-SIXTH GRADE PUPILS VISIT THE SCHOOL

In the second experiment, involving the fifth-sixth grade class, a unit on Life in Mexico was in progress. The children greeted their parents and took them about the classroom explaining their exhibits on Mexico, the instructional materials they had collected to aid their study, and the art and English work that they had completed. Various committees explained their special contributions to the study. In the activities which followed, language arts, arithmetic, art, and science were introduced; children explained how all the school subjects were incorporated in the unit.

In the written evaluation, certain parents expressed the belief that insufficient time was given to the tool subjects. In an hour and a half of discussion over coffee and cookies, many differences of opinion were ironed out. The teacher explained that

much of the morning was spent in drill and work in the tool subjects but that these activities were related as closely as possible to the study of Mexico. Parents were particularly impressed with the amount of reading the children were doing. They commented on how much information the children were looking up at home. When one parent asked if they were learning adverbs and adjectives, another answered, "How often do you think about whether or not the word you are using is an adverb or adjective?" Someone else added, "The children are so interested in the things they're writing that they are not much concerned with the mechanics." Others in the group said, "It is better to use and learn by using." An alert father suggested that they could learn fractions functionally by using recipes and cooking Mexican dishes. Several thought they could help their children and the class by finding materials in their reading that would apply to the study of Mexico. One mother summed up the results of the visit by saying, "It is just wonderful how parents and teachers are co-operating this year, especially in this valley where there has been great friction and factionalism."

The parents of only about half the children participated in this visit. The reason that they did not all attend, perhaps, was that in this case the teacher was not well known to the parents. This was her first year of teaching in the community and certain parents had not met her. The traditional fear of the teacher, especially of a strange one, may have been the reason why this teacher did not have the almost complete response accorded to the second-grade teacher. The problem of getting all the parents to visit and observe in the classroom is indeed a difficult one. Judging from these two experiments, it would seem to depend on the degree of rapport that the teacher has previously established with parents. Probably the age of the children was also an important factor, since parents are more likely to be aware of and concerned about the need for school adjustments of younger children. More emphasis can be placed on school visits and observation by parents as a method of improving home-school relations in the intermediate and upper grades.

### *Evaluation of the Two Experiments*

Parents generally had not previously realized that they were welcome to visit. The observation and the discussion served to eliminate the parents' fear of the teacher—a fear which is often an unconscious carry-over from their own childhood. They also feared they might be considered meddlers in the school's program. The second experiment in which parents visited in the fifth-sixth grade class was especially valuable because the teacher took part in the discussion following the observation, thereby having an opportunity to eliminate some of her own fears, particularly the fear that the parents might be critical of her teaching or the way she handled the children. Knowing the parents does much to eliminate a teacher's fears.

Those parents who believed that the object of education is the mastery of the so-called fundamentals had their vision extended through the discussion period so that they began to see other educational goals. The teacher saw that she might need to improve her techniques in unified learning in order to find greater use for various types of subject matter. As the teacher and parents approached the problems of every child's development and the problem of devising the kind of curriculum that will best contribute to that development, the result was a more scientific attitude of deferring judgment and observing the child and the situation more carefully.

These experiments in planned visitation and observation indicated that this is one of the effective ways by which parents can learn the purposes, values, and methods of modern education. The visits provided a good way for parents to learn about the characteristics and differences of children and about their growth and progress. Such observation must be under guidance so that parents will not overlook important aspects of the program. The thorough evaluation which accompanied the observation and which was amplified afterward helped to clarify parents' understanding and gave the teacher valuable ideas in planning the curriculum.

## GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

The teachers, principal, and county school supervisor agreed upon the following as general rules growing out of the experiments:

1. Children should act as guides and hosts when parents visit the class. They should send invitations for a group visit, take coats, guide parents to displays and explain materials. In addition to the educational value to the pupils, parents see their children taking mature, responsible roles.
2. As much informality as possible should be maintained. It was considered highly important to create an informal, friendly atmosphere in which the parents feel welcome and at ease. For this reason, materials were placed in open displays for examining and handling by parents. Parents were involved in several relay games with the children during recess. While the class was in session they were invited to move about freely, observing the work of the children.
3. Pupils should be educated for adjustments to unusual situations. The emotional climate of the class under normal conditions helps to determine pupil attitudes during visit. The attitude of the class toward interruption and toward the content of the curriculum and the self-direction and responsibility they felt in the classroom seemed to be determining factors in their reactions to this large-scale interruption.

In both cases described, the vitality of the curriculum content made the pupil reports and activities a real class experience to be shared with parents. Also in both cases there had normally been sufficient informality so that interruptions did not unduly disturb activity. This factor needs to be mentioned as being significant if observations, group or individual, are to be successful. The amount of

self-direction and responsibility which pupils were accustomed to exercise seemed to help them conduct themselves with a minimum of disruption.

4. Parents should be helped to recognize the artificial nature of planned group visits. Inasmuch as the desired end leading from this initial step is more frequent, informal, individual visits by parents, the discussion should, and in these cases did, stress the incomplete picture drawn from a group observation and the need for further individual visits.
5. The parents should have an opportunity for evaluation during and after the observation. A guide questionnaire given early in the visit is valuable as a reference during observation. Key questions serve to stimulate thinking, focus observation, emphasize objectivity, and form a basis for organized discussion. Discussion should follow observation. Here points of view can be revealed, exchanged, and sometimes altered. Understandings can be enlarged in terms of problems discussed and a more mutual point of view gained as teacher and parents express themselves. Discussion was considered an absolutely essential part of the visits.
6. The teacher should be included in discussion and evaluation. One experiment was conducted with the teacher absent from the discussion after the observation, the other with the teacher present. In the discussion which included the teacher more growth in understanding by both teacher and parents was noted. Questions as to specifics of the teacher's program were more accurately answered and the teacher was able to secure exact firsthand points of view from the parents.

The teacher can function in the role of an educator of parents. She can be more effective here than anyone else. No one knows the children so well as she and she should be able to evaluate their growth better than any

other individual. Her ability to evaluate her own procedures and classroom methods is more helpful to parents than the evaluation of others.

7. The physical setting should be convenient and attractive. For informality, displays of materials were easily accessible for handling and observation. A shortcoming of these experiments was having visitors' chairs in a formal line at the rear of the room. A scattered, informal placement would have been more conducive to freedom of action in observing children's work.
8. Refreshments should be offered. In one case the parents were invited to lunch with the children and in the other, coffee and cookies were served at the time the discussion started. The feeling was that this procedure provided a release from tension and re-emphasized the informal nature of the situation.
9. The teacher must be skilled in sound human relations. Parents will visit if they are welcome and the teacher is friendly. In these experiments, arrangements were made by the parents themselves for a continuous program of individual parent visitation. They wanted this both because of their convictions about its value and their enjoyment of the visit. In the case where some of the parents did not come for the visit, the teacher planned to go to the homes to become better acquainted and to invite those parents to visit the classroom, setting specific dates for such visits. Often those parents who need most to visit are the last to come. The teacher needs to be patient in following up such cases. A friendly, co-operative attitude on the part of the teacher will usually win the co-operation of the parent. Follow-up is necessary if all the parents are to observe their children's classroom program.
10. Newspaper publicity should follow group visits. In the experiments conducted here, the newspaper published full accounts.



11. Parents should have a feeling of belonging and of participation in the program. Several valuable suggestions were given by parents for improvement of the unit in the fifth-sixth grade experiment. Some of them have since supplied tools and materials for the building of the post office in the classroom. A person who has a part in a program is likely to have more understanding of it. Parents are a resource which the teacher can often utilize for the enrichment of the program. Many of them have special talents which the teacher can exploit to advantage in the classroom.

The results of these two experiments have convinced those who took part that no more fruitful way can be found to improve home-school relations than that of classroom observation by parents, bringing together the three principal agents of the educational process—teacher, parents, pupils—and involving them in a learning situation in which growth is inevitable.

## TEACHER-PARENT CONFERENCES

RUTH DODDS, *Director of Curriculum and Co-ordinator of  
Secondary Education, Sacramento County*

From Siskiyou and Lassen to San Diego and San Bernardino come reports of teachers in rural multi-graded schools and large city systems who are experimenting with methods of talking over Junior with those most interested persons—the parents. How an idea gets into action is always an interesting story.

### IN A KINDERGARTEN

"Where there's a will, there's a way" might be the title of the account given by a kindergarten teacher who works with 50 children in two sessions every day and is convinced that teacher-parent conferences are essential to a good kindergarten program. Her plans include a brief interview at the time of enrollment, then a group meeting to explain the kindergarten program. After this, letters of invitation for individual conferences are sent out. Simple check lists to help parents observe children objectively are enclosed in these letters. On the day of the conference the parent is asked to observe a full session of kindergarten, which is followed by a 20-minute conference after the children have left for the day. This teacher is convinced that parents gain much insight from the observation and states that they are usually ready to do most of the talking and planning during the conference.

One mother watched her only son as he worked with other five-year-olds and realized for the first time that he was less mature than the others. She had been insistent that he go on to the first grade at the mid-term. Now she insists that he spend another six months in kindergarten.

"Jack never does what I tell him to do no matter how loud I yell," observed a mother. "Maybe it's my voice that makes him

mad." The teacher, who had spoken quietly to Jack during the morning, made no comment at this point.

Before the children are transferred to the first grade, the kindergarten teacher arranges a meeting of the mothers and the first-grade teacher. The conference records are sent to the first-grade teacher, who plans to continue the conferences during the coming year.

#### IN AN EIGHTH GRADE

The children had gone home and the teacher of the eighth grade was seated at her desk when the door opened and a parent came into the room. His very carriage indicated resistance to the situation in which he found himself. Apparently this personable parent's experience with school had not always been happy. He was greeted by the teacher, who arose from her desk, shook hands cordially, and with a friendly smile invited him to sit down.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brown. I am so glad that you have come for this visit. We have been having conferences with parents at this school for a long time, but I know you are new to our city." He replied, "Yes, we moved here in July, have finally found ourselves a house and are getting settled."

The teacher continued, "Bob has told us something of his previous school experiences, and we are glad to have him in school. He is a genuine leader in the group." The parent immediately began to relax, and the teacher went on to explain the fine strength of this boy. She told of his many interests in the field of mathematics, science, athletics. Apparently Bob was a well-rounded boy. This conference seemed to be a kind of mutual admiration society as Bob's dad agreed, "Yes, we find that's true at home. Bob is a fine boy. He has all of these wide interests, and besides do you know that he has taken on a paper route? He sets his alarm clock and gets up every morning, goes out and takes care of his deliveries. He gets back in time to have breakfast and come to school."

"There's just one thing that I think we should do for Bob," said the teacher. "I don't know whether you know what I mean, but I find that Bob doesn't finish things that he starts. He doesn't

put the buttons on." The father agreed, "You know, we notice that at home too. He starts a project with great enthusiasm and carries on for awhile, but before he actually reaches the conclusion of his task he has tired of it or some other idea has entered into his thinking. He gives up before he actually finishes the job that he started." The teacher said thoughtfully, "I'm wondering if there is anything that we can do at home and in school to help Bob, because his success in life is going to depend upon this ability to stick to his task until it's finished." The father agreed and then made a suggestion, "Perhaps the jobs that he undertakes get too hard before he finishes them, and he may need a little help. Maybe I could help him. He carries on construction jobs at home, and maybe if I'd help him over that last part of the job, he could go through to completion." The teacher added, "I could do the same thing at school, so Bob would feel the satisfaction of a completed undertaking."

Bob's father left the room with an entirely different posture. A broad smile on his face, shoulders relaxed, he went out in the conviction that his boy, Bob, was in the hands of a fine woman who was the boy's friend as well as his teacher.

When asked the direct question: "What do the teachers think about these conferences?", this teacher said,

At a recent faculty meeting we considered whether they were really helpful to the teacher. I think I am safe in saying that we all believe we do a more effective job of teaching because we know the children so much better after we talk with parents. Parents give us real clues to the causes of children's behavior. One of the teachers new to this system who had trouble with discipline in her former position told me that she doesn't have discipline problems now. She wondered if the understanding that the parents had gained of the things the school is doing didn't mean that the school was getting the right kind of co-operation at home.

Another teacher who had been in the school almost six months was asked what she thought about the conferences. She laughed as she admitted that while she was preparing for the first one she was terrified. How would she begin? Suppose she didn't know all the answers to the problems posed?

We had a staff meeting where members took the roles of teacher and parents and acted out some interviews. This helped. I found in actual interviews that the parents soon appreciated my keen interest in their children, and we got along very happily.

After a moment this newcomer to the faculty added,

I've formed some wonderful friendships in this town as the result of these parent conferences. I have taught in several schools, but I have never felt so much a part of the community as I do here.

### PUPIL PARTICIPATION

The principal of an elementary school has an interesting story to tell of the part played by the pupils in teacher-parent conferences.

Because we knew that the seventh and eighth grade children could do a great deal in making conferences successful, time was taken in the classes to explain to the boys and girls that their parents were not being invited to school to hear all of the bad things about them, but that by means of such a conference it would be possible for the teacher to be better prepared to help them during these years before they started to high school. Certain teachers told the children that they would like to have them sit in on the conference. They appointed the youngsters as hosts or hostesses in showing the parents where to wait and calling them when it was time for their conference. Others helped take care of small children while mothers were in conference.

For two weeks, school was dismissed at the end of the minimum day and the conferences were held. Because our community is one in which many of the mothers are employed, it was necessary to schedule night conferences for certain parents.

At the end of the first conference period, all of the seventh and eighth grade teachers admitted that this method of reporting was superior to the old report-card method used alone. They found that many parents were bewildered by the behavior of their offspring and welcomed the opportunity to discuss their fears. In a few cases the teacher was able to convince the parent that the child needed a physical check-up, even though the nurse had been unable to get action from the same parent. In many instances the teacher and parent arranged either for another conference later in the year or for regular contact with each other by telephone.

At the close of the conference the parent was given a single mimeographed sheet on which were set down briefly the characteristics of the seventh or eighth grade child, what the school was attempting to do for him, and what the home could do to help.

Of course, every parent did not come to school for the conference, and a few wrote curt notes declining the opportunity, but about 70 per cent did keep their appointments that first year and most of them expressed themselves as favoring the idea.

Last fall we had our fifth year of conferences. During the five years our turnover of teachers has been large. The problem of orienting new teachers so that they would feel secure in holding these conferences with parents has come up each year. This last year it was decided to have a dinner for all teachers new to the system and any others who wished to attend, for the purpose of getting background for the conferences and learning techniques. For the most part the program was planned and produced by teachers. Several teachers gave brief talks on different phases of the conference: the best ways of scheduling appointments, how to handle the parent who came with a "chip on his shoulder," how to keep the parent to a discussion of his own child rather than his neighbor's. Three teachers engaged in role-playing and represented a mother and father who came to the conference, were greeted by a teacher who did not even rise to greet them, and then insisted on doing so much talking that they were unable to say much. Another group depicted a conference in which the parents were greeted cordially, seated carefully, and were allowed to express their opinions and went away with the feeling that something had been accomplished by their visit. A film produced by one of our neighboring districts to illustrate the techniques of a good conference was shown and discussed by a teacher. A period for questions followed the program and many teachers expressed their appreciation for the meeting.

We feel that the success of our conferences this past fall proves beyond doubt that this type of reporting can be done despite great difficulties if the teachers, the parents and the children really believe in it. Our seventh- and eighth-grade classes have been operating on double session for almost a year now, which means that school starts at 7:55 in the morning and the classrooms are all in use until five in the afternoon. Only one room, the Teachers' Room, is available for conferences. It looked as though because of the lack of space the conferences could not be held. But hold them we did! It was necessary to extend the period to



four weeks, and people talked together in corners of the hall, on the playground, wherever a more or less sheltered spot could be found. One evidence that they were successful was that about one-fourth of the parents requested a second conference in February.

It has been interesting to watch the reaction of the children as the conference idea has become a regular part of the reporting system. At first they were not too unhappy if their parents did not come to school for the conference. This past year the office phone was busy with children from the seventh and eighth grades calling to remind parents of a conference appointment. Many parents have admitted to us that they hadn't been in a school building since they left school themselves and have expressed surprise and pleasure at the difference in the school rooms, equipment, and furniture from that which they remembered. The parent conferences have been a big step in bridging the traditional gap between the home and the school. The parents of the seventh- or eighth-grade child appreciate as much as the parents of the primary child the opportunity to discuss their son or daughter with the teacher who is with the child for such a long period each day.

### WHAT DO PARENTS WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

What do parents want to talk about when they come for a conference? This question was considered at the Third Annual Conference of Home and School Relationships sponsored by the California Congress of Parents and Teachers in August, 1949. The participants indicated the following key points:

#### 1. *Information about the child*

- a. Scholastic achievement which may be in terms of a child's capacity and rate of growth or relative achievement in his group, or both. Parents ask, "What can I do to help?"
- b. Health conditions as revealed by physical examination and teacher observation, usually including hearing, vision, posture, and dental health
- c. How the child gets along with other children in the classroom and at play
- d. Emotional control when faced with difficult situations

- e. Success in developing qualities of leadership, citizenship, self-direction, sense of responsibility, and other desirable characteristics
  - f. Vocational aptitudes and interests at appropriate grade levels
2. *Information about what is taught and how it is taught*
- a. A description of each school grade, the field of study, and instructional material used
  - b. Information on important changes in teacher practices
  - c. Information on other phases of the school program, including social activities, sports, clubs, musical and dramatic activities, student self-government, and participation in community life

#### GUIDE LINES FOR TEACHER-PARENT CONFERENCES

1. It is desirable that teacher-parent conferences be scheduled twice a year. Other less formal conferences may be held as the need arises.
2. Parents should receive adequate notice of meetings and should be given some choice of time.
3. Teachers must be prepared to interpret the educational program to parents and to assist parents in the understanding of the developmental pattern of children. This preparation may include faculty discussion groups, sociodramas, teachers' handbooks.
4. A successful conference depends upon the teacher's relaxed and friendly manner, her willingness to listen and accept the parents' point of view.
5. A record of each conference should be made in duplicate, and one copy given to the parents.
6. The conference is reciprocal communication; the teacher receives as well as gives valuable information. The conference should result in better co-operative planning for the welfare of the child.

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- H. W. ADAMS, City Superintendent of Schools, Eureka
- CLIFFORD E. BYERS, District Superintendent, Bishop Elementary Schools
- HELEN P. DOAK, Elementary Supervisor, Alhambra Public Schools
- MARY C. DURKIN, General Supervisor of Instruction, Contra Costa County
- WILBUR H. DUTTON, Associate Director of Teacher Training, University of California, Los Angeles
- MELVIN L. FARLEY, Assistant Superintendent, China Lake Elementary School District, Naval Ordinance Test Station, China Lake
- KATHERINE FINCHY, Assistant Superintendent, Palm Springs Unified School District
- RUTH C. HILLERBY, Principal, Linda Vista Elementary School, Los Angeles
- MRS. HOWARDINE G. HOFFMAN, Director, Division of Elementary Education, Los Angeles County
- MARION HORSFALL, President, California Association for Childhood Education, 445 South Central Avenue, Glendale 4
- ROBERT E. JENKINS, Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Instruction, San Diego Public Schools
- MARY BELLE MAXWELL, Primary Consultant, Fresno Public Schools
- MRS. INGA C. McDANIEL, Consultant in Child Guidance, San Bernardino County
- IRMA G. MIDDUP, Supervisor of Art, Alameda County
- EVERETT V. O'ROURKE, Superintendent, Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District
- MRS. LOUISE PARKIN, Principal, Hudnall Elementary School, Inglewood
- ANDREW D. RIPPEY, Principal, College Elementary School, Fresno State College
- PAUL J. ROGERS, District Superintendent, Colton Public Schools
- FRANK SCHIEBER, District Superintendent, Forestville Union School District
- MRS. EDWARD T. WALKER, President, California Congress of Parents and Teachers
- W. NORMAN WAMPLER, Superintendent, Bellflower Elementary School District
- J. POST WILLIAMS, Superintendent of Schools, Tulare County
- FRED A. ZANNON, Director of Education, Kern County
- ELEANORE ZIEL, Consultant in Elementary Education, Monterey Public Schools